

## **DWP pitches solar farm, state park at Owens Lake**

**L.A.'s utility presents its plan to the Lands Commission, which is cautiously receptive. It arose as part of a separate measure to control dust at the dry lake bed, to comply with clean air rules.**

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Los Angeles city officials are drafting a master plan for a proposed solar farm and possibly a state park on Owens Lake, drained nearly a century ago when its water was diverted to the Los Angeles Aqueduct, officials said Thursday.

Representatives with the Department of Water and Power disclosed the concept when they appeared before the California State Lands Commission, which has regulatory authority over the dusty lake bed near Lone Pine.

Commission members, meeting in San Diego, said they were intrigued by the idea but remain wary because of the DWP's history of using its ample political power to get its way and not cooperate with the state panel. A formal proposal could come before the commission in the spring.

The DWP's plans for Owens Lake arose during a hearing on a separate dust control measure that the municipal utility proposed for portions of the lake bed: a series of moats and berms to control dust on 3 1/2 square miles of the 100-square-mile dry lake.

To comply with federal clean air standards, the DWP must control lake bed dust that gets kicked up by the windstorms that have plagued the Owens Valley for decades. The moats are part of the utility's \$500-million dust mitigation plan, and if construction on the project does not begin by Jan. 1, the city could face fines up to \$10,000 a day.

The commission's staff had urged the panel to reject the proposal in part because at least one species of bird -- the endangered snowy plover -- nests on portions of the lake bed and could be trapped and killed in the moats.

However, acting Lt. Gov. Mona Pasquil, one of three commission members, pushed for a compromise to ensure that the DWP and its ratepayers wouldn't be socked with fines. The commission voted 2 to 0 to allow the DWP to begin the initial phase of construction, limited to a series of sand fences that would not pose a threat to wildlife, and will revisit the proposal during its February meeting.

Martin L. Adams, the DWP's director of water operations, assured the commission that the utility is looking for a "better solution."

Earlier this month, the DWP's board of commissioners approved a renewable energy pilot project that would cover 616 acres of lake bed with solar arrays -- a possible precursor to a mammoth solar farm that could cover thousands of acres. Tests show that the solar panels, if built properly, could also be an effective dust control measure, DWP officials contend.

As part of the proposed solar farm, the DWP might enhance a separate dust-control measure that involves flooding portions of the lake bed, which has created critical habitat for tens of thousands of migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. If successful, that portion of Owens Lake could eventually become a state park, Adams told the commission.

Because of the Lands Commission's concerns about the size of the proposed pilot solar project, the array could be scaled back to about 80 acres.

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